



Catawba County Parks e-Newsletter Winter 2009 Edition

Exploring Catawba County Parks: Winter



Winter is a GREAT time to get out and visit the parks! Hiking or biking the trails is a good way to burn off all those extra holiday calories for you and your dog—and if you bring the whole family, it is an awesome opportunity to have some bonding time. There are still plenty of things to observe in the natural world during the winter and some great activities to participate in as well. Light snow brings a completely new perspective and changes the scenery entirely at the parks. We are usually open if the roads are passable—but call ahead to make sure if you are in doubt. Below we have put together a few “must see” lists for winter for those of you who are interested in getting out and

exploring Catawba County’s natural heritage! Since there is always a Ranger on duty at each park, stop in and ask what good things have been seen recently and they will be happy to point you in the right direction!

Evergreen Plants/Wildflowers/Interesting Fruit: American Holly, Heart-leaf Ginger, Downy Rattlesnake Plantain, Puttyroot, Cranefly Orchid, Trout Lily, Round-lobed Hepatica, Christmas Fern, Witch Hazel, Hearts-a-Bursting, Purple Beauty Berry Bush, and Coralberry



Winter Birds At The Feeders: Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper’s Hawk, Red-Breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, and Fox Sparrow along with the more common feeder birds. There have also been two records of Common Redpoll at Bakers Mountain Park and one record of Evening Grosbeak at Riverbend Park! You never know what excitement you might find just watching the feeding stations at any of our facilities.

Winter Birds Away From The Feeders: Wild Turkey, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ring-billed Gull, Barred Owl, Rufous Hummingbird, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, Winter Wren, Savannah Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird.

Other Things To Look For: Winter is a great time to look for animal tracks including White-footed Mouse, Eastern Gray Squirrel, Eastern Chipmunk, Raccoon, Virginia Opossum, Mink, Muskrats, and White-tailed Deer. The American Woodcock, known for its long flexible bill and short fat body, begins its whimsical mating displays. Near dusk, the males will fly up into the air from a clearing in the canopy and spiral back down while making a soft twittering sound. (This is usually the best time ALL YEAR to see them because of their very cryptic habits!) And, after a warm winter rain—look for mass migrations of Marbled and Spotted Salamanders to vernal pools where they will lay their eggs.



Manager's Message

Winter is here again and has the prospect of being interesting in regards to weather events. Several forecasting agencies are predicting cooler than normal temperatures and above normal precipitation. After years of drought and warmer temperatures, the



natural environment could use a normal winter. If you plan on visiting the parks on a day with winter precipitation please call ahead, check the Catawba County Parks Website or our Facebook page to make sure we are open. If the entrance roads are passable, we make every effort to open.

Winter is a great time of year to visit the parks. Strenuous hikes are a little easier when you do not have to combat the heat.

On warmer days, the wildlife can become active and without the foliage cover, you can have some great opportunities to see all kinds of wildlife. All of us here at Catawba County Parks hope you have a joyous and safe holiday season. Take the time to get outdoors, soak up some sunlight, and revitalize your spirit in the natural world. It is a healthy and enriching experience. Please remember to wear layers, stay

hydrated, and wear shoes that are appropriate for cold and wet winter soils. If you have any comments or suggestions feel free to contact me personally.

We look forward to your next visit.

*"Have you ever noticed a tree standing
naked against the sky,
How beautiful it is?
All its branches are outlined, and in its
nakedness
There is a poem, there is a song.
Every leaf is gone and it is waiting for
the spring.
When the spring comes, it again fills the
tree with
The music of many leaves,
Which in due season fall and are blown
away.
And this is the way of life."
- Krishnamurti*



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Fall Recap

In September, Catawba County Parks hosted the fall Carolina Bird Club meeting in Hickory. There were 143 registered participants from across both of the Carolinas, Georgia, New York, and even Canada! Even though the weather was terrible, the combined bird checklist from all of the fieldtrips for the weekend totaled 118 species. Highlighted species from our parks included Bald Eagle, Philadelphia Vireo, Nashville Warbler, and Golden-winged Warbler.



In October, we had lots of fun and a great turnout for our three-park 10-year Anniversary Celebrations! We did everything from having the official ribbon-cutting ceremony with County Commissioner Barbara Beatty at St. Stephens Park to a brisk guided paddle trip in 40-degree weather down the Catawba River at

Riverbend Park to a beautiful stargazing evening with ghost stories at Bakers Mountain Park! We could not have had a better time if we tried!

November brought the remnants of Hurricane Ida through our area and some flooding issues at Riverbend Park that caused the park to be closed for the day. The closing even made the news! There was a story in both the Hickory Daily Record and a news story on WBTV with video clips. Also during the last three months, there were several new bird species added to the official checklists: Stilt Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, and Peregrine Falcon and only one new species of wildflower was found this fall, Striped Gentian.



Meet the Staff

Name: John Robert Sutton, Jr.

Park Where You Work: Bakers Mountain Park—full time

Hometown: Charleston, SC

Family: Wife, Anita; Son, Isaiah

Education: BS in Education from UNC-Pembroke; AAS in Park Ranger Technology and Wildlife Management from Wayne Community College; certified as a North Carolina Environmental Educator

Hobbies: Motorcycling, Camping, and Hiking

Favorite Season: Spring



Favorite Thing About Your Job: Getting to educate kids about nature and the environment

Favorite Place In The Park: Observation Platform (And as a matter of fact, on most Sunday afternoons, you can find John at the platform where he points out landmarks that you can see such as Grandfather Mountain and the Brushy Mountains.)

Holiday Schedule

Catawba County Parks will be CLOSED on December 24 - 25, 2009 for Christmas.

We will be OPEN for the following Holidays:

New Year's Eve—December 31, 2009

New Year's Day—January 1, 2010

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—January 18, 2010

Presidents' Day—February 15, 2010

Catawba County Parks Announces New 4-H Junior Naturalist Club

In conjunction with NC Cooperative Extension, Catawba County 4-H, and the staff at Riverbend Park, a new Junior Naturalist Club will begin in November. We will meet on the second Tuesday of each month at 6 pm in the education building at Riverbend Park. We will cover a variety of topics during the year with each month having a special topic ranging from animals that call the park home to learning about fishing to wildflower identification and everything in between! This free club is geared toward kids' ages 5 to 12 but older kids who have an interest are still encouraged to attend! Please see the meeting topics and dates listed in the Upcoming Events schedule below for a more detailed description of each meeting.



Upcoming Events

Below is a complete list of the programming that our parks will be offering this winter. Each walk will be limited to 20 participants and will be weather dependent. Please feel free to contact the Ranger leading the walk if you have any questions!



4-H Junior Naturalist Club Meeting—Tuesday, December 8, 2009—6 pm

Join the Rangers in the education building at Riverbend Park for an informative look into the life of the Eastern Gray Squirrel. We will begin with a look at a real live squirrel raised by Wildlife Rehabilitator, Vicki Comer, who will tell us what it takes to raise an abandoned baby squirrel. Next, we will make our own Gray Squirrel craft before ending the evening with a brief Power Point presentation by Ranger Lori

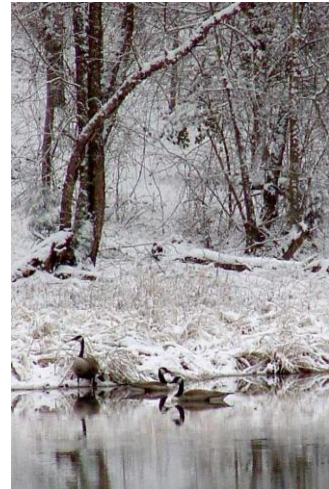
Owenby with interesting facts and trivia about their life history. You will definitely know more about these common animals after this session! All kids and their parents are welcome to attend and it is free to attend. Contact Ranger Lori Owenby at lowenby@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 256-9157 if you have any questions.

**Birds of Riverbend Park—Second Saturday of each month--10 am
December 12, 2009; January 9, 2010; & February 13, 2010**

Join Ranger Dwayne Martin as he explores the shoreline of the Catawba River in search of wintering waterfowl and songbirds. The stretch of the river viewable from Riverbend Park is a great place to see Ring-billed Gulls, Bonaparte's Gulls, and Hooded Mergansers. Common Goldeneye has even been spotted from the park three out of the last five winters with as many as five individuals seen at one time! Bald Eagle and Double-crested Cormorant are always possible and wintering songbirds like Brown Creeper, Golden and Ruby-



crowned Kinglets, Hermit Thrush, and Fox Sparrow usually show up in good numbers. With 196 species now on the official park list, you are sure to find something exciting and different every time you bird in the park. The walk will be two ½ to 3 miles but will be over easy terrain. Please wear comfortable walking shoes and bring binoculars and a field guide. Contact Ranger Dwayne Martin at jdmartin@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 256-9157 to register or if you have any questions.



Winter Tree ID Walk—Saturday, December 19, 2009—10 am

Does the stress of Christmas have you overwhelmed? Take a break! Head out to Riverbend Park where Ranger Lori Owenby will show you how to identify some of the more common trees in our area in the winter. We will look at tree bark, seeds, and growth patterns to help us recognize American Beech, Sycamore, Ironwood, Wild Cherry, Tulip Poplar, Carolina Silverbell and many, many others as we walk along the river trail. This walk will be about one mile. Meet at the park office and please wear comfortable shoes. Contact Ranger Lori Owenby at lowenby@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 256-9157 to register or if you have any questions.



Winter Night Hike—Thursday, December 31, 2009—6 pm thru 8:30 pm

Join Ranger John Sutton as he leads an after-hours hike up Bakers Mountain! We will look and listen for owls and other nocturnal animals as we make our way to the



observation platform near the top of the mountain. Once there, we will have an unparalleled view of the surrounding Catawba Valley. Ranger Sutton will point out the various cities and landmarks that are visible and if the weather cooperates, he will also point out some star formations and planets. This will be a three-mile hike and is moderately strenuous. Please wear comfortable shoes and dress for the weather, as it may be chillier on top of the

mountain. Contact Ranger John Sutton at jsutton@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 324-8461 to register or if you have any questions.

4-H Junior Naturalist Club Meeting—Tuesday, January 12, 2010—6 pm

Join the Rangers in the education building at Riverbend Park for an informative look into the life of the White-tailed Deer. We will play several games to learn about deer including “Herd Manager” and “Deer Talk”. There will be male and female deer skulls to examine and compare and Ranger Alisha Hayes will present a short Power Point about them so we can learn about their lives. You will definitely know more about these common animals after this session! All kids and their parents are welcome to attend and it is free to attend. Contact Ranger Lori Owenby at lowenby@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 256-9157 if you have any questions.



A Day in a Deer’s Life—Saturday, January 16, 2010—2 pm



Ever wondered what the White-tailed Deer at Riverbend Park do in the winter to survive? We will learn about some of the adaptations they undergo throughout the year—like altering the color of their fur and changing their diet to fit the seasons. Ranger Alisha Hayes will show us how to attract deer with mineral licks and food plots. We will also search for signs to look for to know that deer are in the area like scat, tree rubbings, and tracks. This will be a two ½-

mile easy walk. Please wear comfortable shoes. Contact Ranger Alisha Hayes at ahayes@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 256-9157 to register or if you have any questions.

Winter Tree ID Walk—Saturday, January 30, 2010—2 pm

Join Ranger Tabitha Hope at Bakers Mountain Park for a leisurely “tree tour” around the one quarter mile paved ADA accessible trail to see one of the few remaining American Chestnut trees in our area. The American Chestnut used to be one of the most numerous trees in the Southern Appalachian forest, but the population has been decimated by the chestnut blight over the last century. We will also look for bark patterns, seeds, and growth habits to identify Chestnut Oak, Black Gum, Tulip Poplar, Red Maple, and Table Mountain Pine among many others. Contact Ranger Tabitha Hope at thope@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 324-8461 to register or if you have any questions.



4-H Junior Naturalist Club Meeting—Tuesday, February 9, 2010—6 pm

Join the Rangers in the education building at Riverbend Park for an informative look into the lives of our three common owl species. We will have several activities to learn about owls including dissecting an owl pellet, a short “owl prow” to see if we can call up any owls from the woods and Ranger Lori Owenby will present a short Power Point about them so we can learn about their lives. You will definitely know more about these common species after this session! All kids and their parents are

welcome to attend and it is free to attend. Contact Ranger Lori Owenby at lowenby@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 256-9157 if you have any questions.

Great Backyard Bird Count—Friday, February 12 thru Monday, February 15, 2009

The 13th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a GREAT way to get the whole family outside—having fun and being



active—AND doing something in the name of science! All you need is an interest in birds and a field guide. Everyone can participate in this “Citizen Science” project from Cornell Lab of Ornithology from beginners to advanced birders and you can look for birds either in local parks or in your own backyard! You can visit their website at www.birdcount.org for more information or just watch the video below!

Map Reading 101—Saturday, February 20, 2010—1 pm



Are you someone who always gets lost or turned around when walking a trail? Would you like to know more about all those squiggly lines on the map? Then this “class” is for you! Parks Manager Blair Rayfield and Ranger Lori Owenby will team up to teach you a few tricks to keep you oriented and headed in the right direction. We will learn about contour lines, pace, and directional signs—and a few simple tips that will make you feel more comfortable while walking the trails at Riverbend Park. This will be an easy two-mile walk. Please

wear comfortable shoes. Contact Ranger Lori Owenby at lowenby@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 256-9157 to register or if you have any questions.

Wildlife Walk—Saturday, February 27, 2010—2 pm

Bakers Mountain Park is home to many animal and bird species. Ranger John Sutton will teach us about the ones that use the feeders around the office. We will see Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, and hopefully a Nuthatch “tri-fecta” including Brown-headed, Red-breasted, and White-breasted Nuthatches. Brown Creepers and Downy



Woodpeckers are also frequent visitors to the suet that is offered—but the birds are not the only ones that visit—we will watch for Eastern Chipmunks filling their cheeks under the feeders as well. We will also find a few old woodpecker holes and “knock” on the trees to see if a Screech Owl or Flying Squirrel is home too! This will be an easy one-mile walk. Please wear comfortable shoes. Contact Ranger John Sutton at jsutton@catawbacountync.gov or call (828) 324-8461 to register or if you have questions.